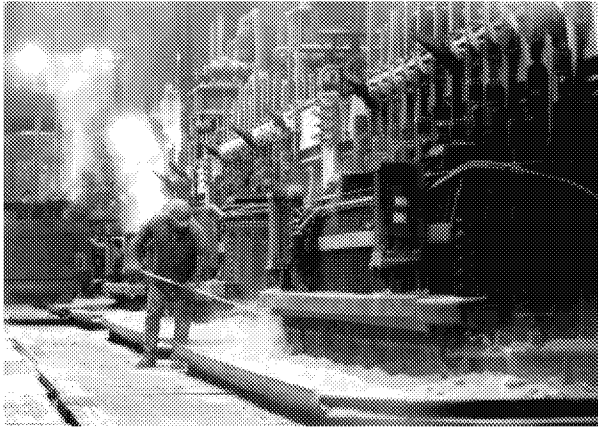




COLUMBIA FALLS

Governor joins call for Superfund listing for Columbia Falls aluminum plant



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HELENA – Gov. Steve Bullock has joined the call to have the shuttered Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. plant placed on the federal Superfund National Priorities List, a step toward gaining federal funding to clean up the 120-acre site.

Last fall, the Environmental Protection Agency said that pollution at the plant qualifies it as a Superfund site, but it wanted the public's support before moving forward.

An EPA study found cyanide, arsenic, lead and fluoride in the groundwater in and around the plant. Low levels of arsenic were found in two of five residential wells tested in a nearby neighborhood.

"I am concerned that if this issue remains unaddressed, the contamination from the site is serious enough to pose long-term risks to the community and to Montana's environment, including the Flathead River," Bullock wrote Tuesday, adding that there is widespread local support for the listing and eventual cleanup.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Jon Tester urged the listing in early January, the Flathead Beacon reported.

Superfund is a federal environmental program established to clean up abandoned hazardous waste sites.

The Anaconda Co. opened the aluminum plant in 1955. It operated on-and-off under several different owners until 2009, when current owner Glencore, closed the plant.

"The plant was a critical part of the economy of Columbia Falls and the site has been idle for too long," Bullock wrote to EPA regional administrator Shaun McGrath. "It has tremendous potential for redevelopment and will be an important anchor in the future of the region."

Bullock asked McGrath to work with the state Montana Department of Environmental Quality and use local contractors, where possible.